

El Centro Field Office

District Advisory Council Report

June 2010

Geothermal:

Wister leases: 2 geothermal lease applications in the El Centro Field Office Wister management area (Ormat and Western Geothermal Partners) were approved within the nationwide Geothermal Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (December 17, 2008). The Wister ROD was signed December 2, 2009 and allowed for the leasing of these two applications. Ormat (Lease number 43965) has submitted a notice of intent to perform geothermal exploration on their lease area in order to conduct surface geophysical exploration. The project would involve using a vibrating truck and seismic sensors in order to map the geologic properties of the area and determine where future exploration wells may need to be placed.

West Chocolate Mountains EIS: The BLM has begun to analyze a larger area that we refer to as the West Chocolate Mountains for geothermal, wind, and solar resources. A programmatic EIS will be developed to determine the potential for these lands to be developed along with best management practices. A public scoping meeting was held March 4, 2010 in Calipatria, Calif. The scoping report has been prepared and BLM is currently developing a draft EIS.

Solar Energy: We have received numerous applications for solar energy development throughout our field office area. We are currently reviewing the Plans of Development submitted by the various companies to determine if they contain enough information to move forward.

Stirling Solar Two (Now Imperial Valley Solar): The BLM is continuing to analyze the Imperial Valley Solar Project, and continues to work with California Energy Commission (CEC), State Historical Preservation Officer and the Advisory Council. BLM is continuing consultation the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for Flat-Tailed Horned Lizard and Peninsular Bighorn Sheep in the project area. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is collaborating with BLM for our environmental analysis for Tessera's 404 permit. The BLM released on February 26, 2010, a draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) for public comment and the CEC released a staff assessment (SA) for the project. The comment period ended on May 27, 2010. BLM is preparing the Final EIS and anticipate the Notice of Availability for the final this summer.

Wind Energy: Applications for wind energy testing facilities include proposals from Telstar, RENEWergy, Imperial Wind, John S. Patterson PhD, Riverside Wind, and John Deere Renewables. Iberdrola has requested installation of three additional wind monitoring devices for their Tule Wind Project and work on an Environmental Assessment for this is underway. . We have also received an application for Class III Right Of Way (ROW) for wind energy development from Pattern Energy in the Ocotillo area.

Transmission Lines:

SDG&E Sunrise Powerlink Project – On January 20, 2009, BLM issued ROW to SDG&E for this project. A notice of availability of the ROD was published in the Federal Register on February 20, 2009 beginning a 30-day appeal period. Three appeals were filed with the IBLA one was withdrawn, one was dismissed. On May 14, 2010 the IBLA affirmed BLM's decision to authorize the ROW grant for the transmission line. A lawsuit was filed against DOI, BLM, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on February 22, 2010 by Back Country Against Dumps, The Protect Our Communities Foundation, East County Community Action Coalition and Donna Tisdale. Any Notices to Proceed on BLM land can only be obtained after SDG&E has demonstrated compliance with all mitigation prerequisites including those contained in the Biological Opinion for the Sunrise project. CPUC has issued 4 Notices To Proceed on private land for work on existing substations and construction yards in preparation for the project. BLM is continuing work on the Programmatic Agreement with the SHPO.
Project website:

<http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/aspen/sunrise/sunrise.htm>.

ECO Substation/Tule Wind Development: SDGE has submitted an application for a ROW for a transmission line for the proposed ECO substation in Jacumba. This transmission line would connect the ECO substation with the existing Boulevard substation. The substations are located non-federal lands, whereas the proposed transmission would cross 1.5 miles of BLM land within a designated utility corridor.

Iberdrola has applied for wind energy development for the Tule Wind Project in McCain Valley, CA. A Notice of Intent was published on December 29, 2009 to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Proposed Tule Wind Project and the Proposed East County Substation Project, San Diego County, CA. BLM is analyzing the two projects (Tule Wind Project and ECO Substation) together as connected actions under one EIR/EIS with CPUC as the CEQA lead and BLM as the NEPA lead. BLM and CPUC are preparing a joint EIR/EIS and plan to have a Notice of Availability for the draft out this summer.

Southwest Transmission Partners: BLM received application from Southwest Transmission partners to build a 500-kV transmission line from north Gila bend substation to the Imperial Valley substation. The El Centro office is currently waiting for a plan of development to be submitted.

Cultural Resources: THE YUHA DESERT AUDIO TOUR

The El Centro Field Office of BLM is one of the most heavily visited BLM Field Offices in terms of off-highway vehicle (OHV) use in all of California. Many of these recreators are family groups out to experience the unique resources of the desert environment and encouraging exploration and learning opportunities for these visitors in a safe and interesting manner is very important. The BLM already has a very informative website which lists various areas of the Imperial Valley that offer unique and exciting places to visit. As part of developing those

interpretive web pages, the El Centro Field Office hired three archaeological interns to develop a downloadable self-guided audio-tour podcast and CD that features information about three points of interest along one of the main OHV routes through the Yuha Desert Area of Critical Environmental Concern. It encourages children and adults to get off of, or out of, their vehicles and explore the desert. Other goals of the audio tour include educating the public about the idea of there being a lot more to the Yuha Desert than just trails for OHV recreation, helping them understand the vast cultural history of the region, and invoke a feeling of stewardship and encouraging the public to become stewards of the lands. The three stops include the Juan Bautista de Anza Overlook Monument, the Yuha Well and the Yuha Geoglyph.

***1st stop-The Anza Overlook:** In commemoration of the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, listeners are invited to imagine how almost 300 Mexican colonists traveled through the badlands below the monument on their way north to San Francisco in 1775.

***2nd stop-The Yuha Geoglyph:** At this stop on the audio tour, visitors can see remnants of the prehistoric past take shape with this unique geoglyph on the edge of the Yuha Mesa. With the help of Preston Arrow-weed, acclaimed tribal elder and singer, the audio tour explores the ceremonial use of such sites as well as why they are such precious reminders of the people who made them.

***3rd stop-The Yuha Well:** At the well, listeners can explore the area, learn about the plants and walk in the footsteps of both the Kumeyaay and Spanish colonists who made use of the water found at the Yuha well.

Eventually, other points of interest will be added to the audio tour.

Devil's Canyon: BLM prepared an Environmental Assessment for vehicular access into Devil's Canyon in western Imperial County. This trail was not recognized by the CDCA plan or Western Colorado Route of Travel designation (WECO). The trail is extremely rugged and only specialized vehicles are capable of traversing this type of terrain. There is a strong recreational demand for trails suitable for "rock crawling". Devil's canyon traverses critical habitat for the federally listed Peninsular Bighorn Sheep, and sheep are frequently sighted near this trail along Interstate 8.

Because of the concerns over Big Horn Sheep and the complexity of amending our route designation into critical habitat, BLM proposed to allow use of this trail through Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) which would authorize uses of the trail at specific times outside the Bighorn Sheep lambing season. The EA was released for public comment in June of 2009 and BLM received a great deal of public concern over the restrictions and requirements for SRPs for use the trail particularly the insurance requirements.

Since that time, BLM has reviewed the SRP regulations to determine what flexibility we may have in issuing permits, and have found that we may be able to waive the requirement for permit holders to obtain insurance. We are committed to working with the 4 wheel drive clubs to develop a process by which the general public can utilize the trail under an SRP and will continue discussions with clubs to determine how best to administer this program.

Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA)

Temperatures in the ISDRA are now averaging over the 100°F mark keeping visitation to a minimum. As of 6/7/2010 the cumulative visitation is 1,142,999, a -9% reduction compared to the same time last year. The next large spike in visitation will be during October 29 – 31, 2010. The majority of the summer visits are tourists pulling off Interstate 8 into the Buttercup area. Camp hosts are there throughout the summer to answer question and be a point of contact for BLM.

Summer Projects: The South Dunes ARRA toilet project was completed and new ADA access pads were installed at several of the key locations. BLM utilized staff assistance from the Barstow Field Office Force Account to complete the final cement work to get a quality job complete in the most efficient manner.



Summer time is when the large scale projects get done in the dunes. Braving the dangerous heat, the BLM staff move the endless drifting sand off the camping areas and access road. Without this continual effort, there would be significantly reduced access when visitors arrive in October.

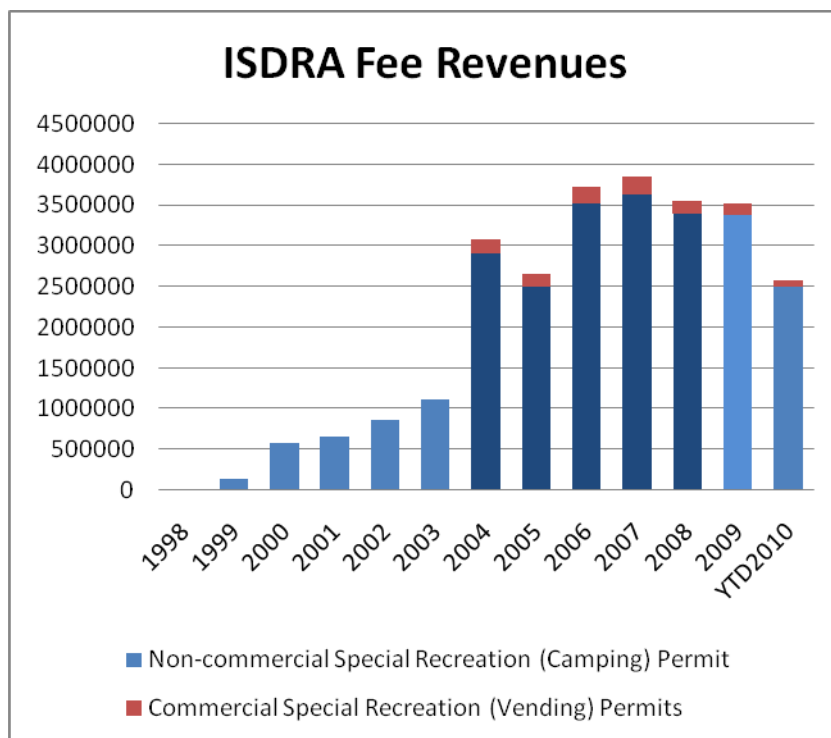
BLM is continuing to work on the Buttercup Ranger Station. Final stages of the storage building construction are underway and projected to be ready for use at the beginning of the next visitation season.

Planning: The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is extending the public comment period for the Draft Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area Management Plan (RAMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), for 45 days, giving the public until August 9, 2010 to provide input on the plan.

Teri Raml, BLM Desert District Manager said the BLM had received a number of requests for additional time to comment. "Given the complexity of this plan and the broad public interest in

its outcome, we decided an extension of the original 90-day comment period was warranted," she said.

Fee Collection: Between October 2009 and the end of May 2010, the BLM has collected \$2,501,809 through the sales of 59,537 dunes permits. Although this is a 17% drop in revenues and a 22% drop in the number of permits sold compared to this time last season, fee compliance remains high at 91% (random check of 9,512 vehicles). Due to our differential on-site / off-site fee schedule, the off-site sales are at 66% YTD. These off-site sales, through vendors, have also injected \$190,182 into the local and regional economy and increased foot traffic in these retail outlets.



Law Enforcement

Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area:

With the Memorial Day Weekend behind us and the temperature rising, visitation to the Dunes has all but ceased. Reoccurring patrol presence will be seen in the area, especially in the evening when temperatures are tolerable for a night ride on a sandrail or ATV.

Plaster City, Superstition Mountain, and Yuha Desert

Use has decreased due to the rising temperature. Rangers plan to participate in the multi-agency desert heat safety patrols in an effort to locate and assist public land visitors and illegal immigrants who are on foot in the desert region without the necessary life sustaining supplies. The intent of the safety patrols is to make our presence obvious to anyone who may be in need of medical attention. The hope is to find the individuals at an earlier stage of hyperthermia and hopefully prevent them from entering heat stroke.

McCain Valley/Eastern San Diego County Public Lands

To escape the heat and enjoy the mountainous outdoor recreation opportunities in the McCain Valley and Julian areas, many residents enjoy weekend recreation opportunities BLM offers like

camping and ATV trail riding. BLM Rangers are providing an increased presence to provide visitor information to the public.

Significant Activity:

Colorado River District, AZ – Memorial Holiday Detail

During the Memorial Day weekend, eight Colorado River District (CRD) Rangers and two Rangers from El Centro and Needles Field Offices conducted operations in the CRD.

The Rangers issued a total of 127 violation notices, 93 written warnings, and made four arrests. Citations included 28 alcohol related, 6 drug related, 5 fire related, and 15 watercraft related offenses. The remaining citations were for various OHV, vehicle, resource, and recreation area related offenses. Two felony arrests (drug and unlawful flight), one DUI arrest, and one State warrant arrest were made. One stolen motorcycle was recovered with a suspect. The Rangers also assisted other agencies on eight incidents, including the winch rescue of a stranded Sheriff's Office vehicle from the Gila River and a man tracking of two suspected armed suspects.

Sonoran Desert National Monument, AZ – Operation Sonoran Saturation II

From May 3 to May 11, 2010, an operation was conducted by Arizona Agents and Rangers (including detailed Rangers from El Centro) to address increased smuggling of drugs and humans on the Sonoran National Monument. Patrols were conducted on a 24-hour basis for a period of roughly one week. Intelligence gathered during the operation included the discovery of several camps / layups used by smugglers and new roads being created by trafficking organizations. There were several instances where the surveillance teams either found the smugglers utilizing the team's planned surveillance location or had scouts in the immediate area forcing the team's extraction. The amount of resource damage resulting from smuggling activities has increased throughout the public lands in the area. The operation resulted in the following: Illegal Alien Incidents 21, Illegal Aliens turned over to CBP 68, Marijuana Seized in Pounds 2,306, Weapons Seized 3, Vehicle Pursuits 5, K-9 Deployments 14, Total Vehicles Seized / Impounded: 29, Abandoned 9, Stolen/Abandoned 13, Seized through Contact 7, Arrests for Prosecution 3, Alien with Firearm 1, Possession of Marijuana 2.

Wind River Indian Reservation, WY – BIA Operation Alliance

From May 10 - 24, 2010, six BLM Rangers (including three from the El Centro Field Office) and five Forest Service Officers patrolled the Wind River Indian Reservation located in northeast Wyoming in support of Operation Alliance, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) violent crime reduction initiative. Along with six permanent and four detailed BIA officers, multi-agency law enforcement officers provided increased patrol presence by effectively tripling the size of the BIA Wind River Agency Police Department. By the end of the 15 day detail, BLM Rangers had made a total of 95 arrests and issued 37 citations. Arrests included: 23 for public intoxication, 19 for tribal warrant, 14 for DUI, 9 for resisting arrest, 7 for driving on suspended/revoked license, and 7 for disorderly conduct charges. Of the 37 citations, 27 were issued for driving without a license. A number of contacts were made that resulted in warnings. As a result of increased enforcement activity, Rangers noticed an increase in vehicle code compliance including the use of seatbelts. Traffic flow reduced significantly in the early morning hours, a sign of effective deterrence of DUIs. When asked, residents stated the community has noticed the increased law enforcement presence. Tribal leadership and the BIA fielded a number of questions and concerns

over the increased police activity. Significant BLM enforcement actions included: (1) response to a fight in progress resulting in consent to enter a residence where Rangers discovered a number of small baggies of marijuana packaged for sale and over \$1000 in twenty dollar bills. Four arrests were made; (2) a traffic stop and associated arrest resulted in a physical confrontation. Multiple officers were required to gain control of the vehicle's occupant as well as the combative occupants of a nearby house. One officer was struck in the face while trying to effect an arrest. Four subjects were arrested and marijuana packaged for sale was found in one of the vehicles. The subject who assaulted the Ranger fled the scene. Federal assault charges are pending.

McCain Valley Road, CA – Search and Rescue

On May 3, 2010, at approximately 1900 hrs El Centro Rangers received a report of two adult males trapped in a crevasse inside a cave on BLM administered lands. Two Rangers responded to assist San Diego Sheriff's Deputies already on scene. An Incident Command Center was mobilized. Witnesses stated the men were approximately 200 feet from exiting the cave when one became wedged in a very narrow section of the cave, leaving the second without an escape route. The men had been trapped for nearly three hours when initial units arrived on scene. Several search and rescue teams from San Diego County, San Bernardino County, and San Diego Border Patrol BORSTAR assisted in the rescue. Teams had to be airlifted in by helicopter ½ mile from the victims and then hike to the cave. At approximately 0415 hrs, rescuers were able to free the two men in the cave. The men were ambulatory, exhausted, but suffered no injuries after being trapped for close to 12 hours. They were cleared by emergency medical personnel on scene.

A number of El Centro Rangers are scheduled for temporary duty in Oregon this summer. Assignment locations include Eugene, Salem, Coos Bay, and Prineville.

Staffing

Two Rangers have permanently transferred to Salem and Eugene Oregon, respectively. A new-hire Ranger is set to start on duty June 7. He will be attending academy July-September and starting field training in October. A Field Training Officer (FTO) has been selected for El Centro and will attend training in August. An FTO on staff will benefit new Rangers by allowing them to train in their home office instead of other locations throughout the Western States. Vacancies are taking about 9-12 months to fill due to the extensive hiring process.

The current table of organization for law enforcement includes one chief, one supervisor, and thirteen Rangers charged with patrolling 1.4 million acres of public lands in Imperial and San Diego Counties.

Administrative

We have several vacant positions:

- Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner
- Environmental Protection Specialist
- Contact Representative

- 2 Law Enforcement Rangers
- Park Ranger